

# I. INTRODUCTION

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# I. INTRODUCTION

*This land management plan is a living document that describes the dynamic ecological conditions and managerial goals of the Mouth of Cottonwood Creek Wildlife Area. It is designed to be updated by area managers as more information is gathered and management goals are refined. It is written for a wide range of audiences with varying degrees of expertise in ecosystem level and adaptive management techniques as well as varying levels of familiarity with the Wildlife Area itself. Sections are written to stand alone with cross-references so that information can be regrouped as needed to fit planning and outreach needs. We hope it will fit the needs of land managers, policymakers and educators alike.*



Southeast entrance to the Balls Ferry Wetland Unit 1, Mouth of Cottonwood Creek Wildlife Area, July 2005. SEI.

## About the California Department of Fish and Game

The mission of the California Department of Fish and Game is to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) maintains native fish, wildlife, plant species and natural communities for their intrinsic and ecological value and their benefits to people. This includes habitat protection and maintenance in a sufficient amount and quality to ensure the survival of all species and natural communities. The CDFG is also responsible for the diversified use of fish and wildlife including recreational, commercial, scientific and educational uses.

**Purpose of State Wildlife Areas.** The CDFG currently manages more than 100 state wildlife areas. These areas are scattered throughout the state, most located in central and northern California. The state owns about two-thirds of the total acreage while the remainder is managed under agreements with other public agencies. The state acquires these wildlife areas to protect and enhance habitat for wildlife species, and to provide the public with wildlife-related recreational uses. These lands provide habitat for a wide array of plant and animal species, including many listed as threatened or endangered.

**Purpose of CDFG Land Management Plans.** The CDFG develops management plans for all its lands. Its purpose in preparing land management plans (LMPs) is multifold:

- To guide management of habitats, species and programs to achieve the CDFG's mission to protect and enhance wildlife.
- To identify appropriate public uses of the property.
- To serve as a descriptive inventory of the fish, wildlife and native plant habitats that occur on or use the property.
- To provide an overview of the property's operation and maintenance, and personnel requirements to implement management goals. It also serves as a budget planning aid for annual regional budget preparation.
- To provide a description of potential and actual environmental impacts and subsequent mitigation that may occur during management, and to provide environmental documentation to comply with state and federal statutes and regulations.

## About the Mouth of Cottonwood Creek Wildlife Area

The Mouth of Cottonwood Creek Wildlife Area (MCCWA) consists of three units: the original Cottonwood Creek Unit, purchased piecemeal between 1981 and 1993, and the two recently acquired Balls Ferry wetland units. The State of California originally acquired the land to:

1. Protect, restore, enhance and develop riparian and wetland habitats.
2. Protect and enhance salmon and steelhead spawning habitat, an important component of the fragile Sacramento River anadromous fishery.
3. Provide public use with an emphasis on interpretive and educational use.

The Balls Ferry Wetland Unit 1 (BFW1) was acquired with the additional long-term goal of providing outdoor educational opportunities for nearby academic institutions as well as a junior hunt program (S. Arrison, CDFG Area Manager (ret.), personal communication). Balls Ferry Wetland Unit 2 (BFW2) was acquired primarily to protect short-grass foraging habitat for wintering waterfowl (J. Chakarun, CDFG Wildlife Habitat Supervisor II, personal communication).

The CDFG also manages land within the northwest section of the Cottonwood Creek Unit as a wetland mitigation bank on behalf of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The Cottonwood Creek Mitigation Bank is managed and funded independently of the Wildlife Area and is not specifically addressed in this plan.

**Preparation of the MCCWA Land Management Plan.** The MCCWA LMP demonstrates CDFG's commitment to ecosystem management in accordance with the laws of the United States and the State of California. It incorporates the best available scientific information concerning the natural and cultural resources of the area, and affirms the CDFG's commitment to coordinate and cooperate with other local interests and conservation entities that are active throughout the region. The LMP is an ecosystem-based adaptive management plan that incorporates planning, implementation, monitoring, analysis and adaptation to realize management goals.

The LMP is intended to guide management decisions to create a sustainable system over the long term. Management of the Wildlife Area is intended to benefit both common and sensitive species of wildlife and plants. It may also contribute to the recovery of state and federally listed species.

The LMP has been developed with guidance from the CDFG's "A Guide and Annotated Outline for Writing Land Management Plans, February 2004" (updated in 2007) (California Department of Fish and Game 2004, 2007). The CDFG provided overall guidance to the planning process and was responsible for all decisions about the content of the plan. Sustain Environmental Inc, under contract to the CDFG, provided technical and scientific expertise, and was responsible for most administrative aspects of the plan, including preparation of the draft LMP. A list of document preparers is provided at the end of the LMP (VII).

Information to guide the plan's content came from three primary sources:

1. CDFG policy and federal and state law.
2. Consultation with area land managers as part of an integrated planning program.
3. Information collected about the occurrence of biological and cultural resources (including limited field surveys) and analysis of scientific literature to assess the efficacy of different management strategies.

**Development of Management Goals.** The staff and area land managers from the CDFG's North Coast Region provided the primary source of information on management issues at the MCCWA. Management goals and objectives were crafted based on initial planning interviews with CDFG staff and extensive review of previous meeting notes between CDFG staff and various local area collaborators. Refinement of these goals continued through follow-up interviews and meetings with CDFG North Coast Region land managers and biologists.

To assist with achieving consistency with the California Resources Agency and CDFG partner agencies, state resource planning documents were also considered in the development of management goals. CDFG is an integral part of the California Resources Agency, which oversees the management of the state's natural resources. The CDFG partners with the California Wildlife Conservation Board, which directs public investments in wildlife conservation, and the California Fish and Game Commission, which provides rulemaking decisions. Key planning documents reviewed for the LMP included:

- [California Wildlife Action Plan](#) (UC Davis Wildlife Health Center 2005, 2007)
- [Resource Status Assessment & Trends Methodology](#) and [Legal Mandates Related to the Conservation of Land and Natural Resources](#) (California Resources Agency 2002, 2001)
- [Riparian Bird Conservation Plan](#) (Riparian Habitat Joint Venture 2004)
- [Oak Woodland Bird Conservation Plan](#) (California Partners in Flight 2002)
- [Cottonwood Creek Ecological Management Zone](#) (CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Plan 2000a)
- [Cottonwood Creek Watershed Assessment](#) (CH2MHill 2002)

Goals for the MCCWA are based on adaptive management principles. As such, management goals focus first on establishing baseline conditions of biological diversity, habitat integrity and environmental health within the Wildlife Area. This information will help CDFG staff to determine how effective current management practices are in sustaining the MCCWA, as well as assist in the development of meaningful indicators and performance measures for determining management success in the future.

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) an Initial Study (IS) was prepared to evaluate if LMP implementation would adversely impact the environment (Appendix F). A proposed Negative Declaration (ND) finding has been prepared because the Initial Study analysis concluded that this LMP, as proposed, would not have potentially significant adverse environmental impacts.

The MCCWA LMP is programmatic in nature; thus, specific projects that may be developed consistent with the plan are not currently known. Full implementation of the LMP's goals and tasks is also contingent upon having adequate staff and operating budget. Any future projects will need to be evaluated in conjunction with the IS/ND to assess if additional project-specific CEQA analysis is necessary. CEQA Guidelines Sections 15162-15164 will be consulted to determine the extent of additional CEQA review required.

**A General Policy Guide.** The MCCWA LMP is a general policy guide to the management of the Wildlife Area. It does not specifically authorize or make a precommitment to any substantive physical changes to the Wildlife Area. With the exception of ongoing habitat restoration and enhancement, and operations and maintenance activities, any substantive physical changes that are not currently approved will require subsequent authorizations and approvals. Future projects may also require additional permits, consultations or approvals. Examples of such requirements include:

- *California State Lands Commission*: Consultation/permit for possible secondary impacts to surrounding lands underlying rivers and streams
- *CDFG*: Internal consultation regarding California Endangered Species Act (CESA) compliance and streambed alteration agreements (CDFG Code Section 1602)
- *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)*: Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation and take authorizations
- *Regional Water Quality Board*: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System construction stormwater permit (Notice of Intent to proceed under the statewide General Construction Permit); Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 401 clean water certification if CWA Section 404 permit is required or if isolated wetlands subject to the Porter-Cologne Act will be affected
- *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)*: Section 404 CWA permit for discharge or fill of waters of the U.S., Section 10 Rivers and Harbors Act permit for work in navigable waters of the U.S.
- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*: ESA consultation and take authorizations